



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation with Homeless Men
Men's Shelter, Rockville, MD
August 20, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on health and well-being in partnership with Health Care for the Homeless on Thursday, August 20, 2015. The conversation took place from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm in Rockville, MD. There were 17 participants. The conversation was facilitated by Carlos Ugarte.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Due to the size of the group, there was one discussion instead of break out groups. Participants were offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing. The conversation was abbreviated in order to comply with the shelter's schedule and the availability of participants.

Health and Well-Being

The facilitator began the process by asking the participants the following questions: 1) Think of when you have been in your most healthy state. Tell us how it looks and feels to you. Think of it in terms of where you live, work, play and worship and 2) What in your community (where you live, work, play, worship) helps you to be in this healthy state?

The following exemplifies the factors that were identified as being in a health state and positive quality of life:

- Having a healthy body. Mental and physical health are both important.
- Having challenging work that generates sufficient income, provides health insurance and where one can be creative.
- Money to have nice things.
- Being able to support one's family.
- Being able to exercise and have fun (while exercising).
- Having healthy foods.
- Less stress, being able to be calm.
- Having a happy home with family and friends. Family and church backup and support. A good/supportive marriage.
- Access to healthcare.
- A good work/life balance.
- Being self-sufficient.



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- Having good relationships with neighbors.

Barriers to Health and Well-Being

When the group was asked “What makes living a healthy life in your community hard?”, the following factors were identified:

- Public transportation – the costs and it take extra time to use.
- Motivating oneself to eat healthy.
- Housing is expensive in Montgomery County.
- The cost of living in the county.
- It’s difficult to access services. Applications for services and jobs are computerized and not everyone is computer literate.
- There’s not enough assistance in Montgomery County including food stamps. “The \$16 I get a month for food is not enough”
- Montgomery County is expensive; wages are not enough to cover costs.
- Coordination of services is an issue, especially if you have multiple health issues.
- Life stressors including work hours and low wages.
- Specific to this group’s needs at the homeless shelter: There is good food available but some of the men have diabetes and that is not taken into account in the variety or preparation of food.
- The rudeness and negative attitude of some people at service points is a challenge.

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

The following lists the comments to the question “What practical steps can be taken to improve the health and well-being of your community?”

- Need to address the lack of service availability including at the shelter, temporary assistance for needy families, food stamps, health insurance.
- Review the rules and regulations for services (including at the shelter) – Are they working? Do they help? Do they make sense?
- Montgomery County needs an affordable housing plan.

When the group was asked which of these action steps (above) should be taken immediately or are most important, the consensus was that **affordable housing** is the priority. Healthcare, access to a variety of health foods, higher amounts for food stamps were also mentioned as high on the list.



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Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, “Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?” A few participants responded to this question and their comments are provided below.

Lower house [housing] cost.

It was informative.

I think when results of all information is made available it should be done so in an understandable and simple language. Thank you.